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## Spirituality

What is spirituality? Spirituality – *rabbaniat* – means ‘Giving in to God.’ The spiritually inclined so elevate themselves’ their thinking that they begin to live on a higher divine plane.

They remain undisturbed in the face of provocation, their mental balance is not upset by unpleasant experiences, and the distasteful behaviour of others does not arouse any feelings of anger or revenge in them. Living strictly by their principles, their mental level becomes so high that the stone cast by others cannot reach them. In spirituality they find such sublimity that all else pales into insignificance. Spirituality in itself is such a great virtue that the seeker after divine bliss need quest no further.

On the other hand, those who have no such spiritual inclinations allow themselves to be constantly influenced by their immediate surroundings and thus remain unhappily embroiled in human strife. They cannot, like spiritual people, smile when abused. Nor, in countless situations, can they adopt the attitude of ‘forgive and forget.’ They reach such a low ebb mentally and emotionally, that, spiritually, they become incapable of making progress.

Life’s experiences for both the spiritual and the non-spiritual are like the grasping of a rosebush. On each branch are beautifully shaped and coloured blossoms whose scent refreshes from afar the weary in body and spirit. But also on each branch are the inevitable thorns. The spiritual individual will carefully avoid the thorns in order to take possession of the blossom, or if by accident, his hands are pricked by the thorns, he dismisses it as a trivial matter. But the unspiritual person, in his unseemly ways will rudely grasp both thorns and flowers, and will recoil in anger and dismay, baulked of his prize, and burning with resentment.

Where spirituality makes the best of life’s experiences – although there is no rose without a thorn – the lack of spirituality makes the worst of them. Where spirituality implies elevation of the soul, the lack of it implies the baser instincts of jealousy, greed, selfishness and exploitativeness.

It will only be when great numbers of the spiritually inclined come together that a society will be formed which shines like the sun and flourishes like lush green gardens.

## Piety

*Taqwa* means piety, that is, leading a life of caution and restraint in this world.

Umar Farooq, the second Caliph once asked a companion of the Prophet what *taqwa* was. He replied, "O leader of the believers, have you ever crossed a path which has thorny shrubs, on both sides?" But the companion instead of replying asked another question, "What did you do on such an occasion?" Umar Farooq replied, "I gathered my clothes close to me and moved ahead cautiously." The companion said, "This is the stuff of *taqwa*."

The present world is a testing ground. Here, various kinds of thorns have been scattered for the purpose of testing man, such as negativity, false issues raised by non-serious people, the lure of worldly things. Besides these, there are many unpleasant Occurrences which disturb people's minds and lead them away from the path of virtue.

All these things are like thorny shrubs lining both sides of the path of life. At any moment it is feared that man may embroil himself in these thorns and then instead of going forward, remain entrapped in these snares of life.

In such a state of affairs the wise man is one who travels the paths of life by gathering up his clothes to avoid becoming, entangled in these unpleasant snares. In this way, he is able to continue his journey unhampered. Yet at all times he must remain conscious of the fact that he must protect himself. He has to adopt the path of avoidance, not of entanglement.

Man has been created with an upright nature. If no hindrance comes in the way, then every man will, on his own, take the right course. That is why, the utmost precaution must be taken against allowing unnatural obstacles to come in the way.

Then, guided by this upright nature, man will continue to walk along the right path until he meets his Lord.

## THINKING OF GOD IN MOMENTS OF CRISIS

'Ali, the son of Abu Talib, related how Fatima, his wife and also daughter of the Prophet had to do all the housework herself. Her hands used to become blistered from working a millstone, her clothes became dirty from sweeping the floor, and having to bring water from outside in a large leather bag had left a mark on her neck. On one occasion when the Prophet had influx of servants, 'Ali suggested to Fatima that she go and request her father to give her one of them to help her in her work. She duly went to see him, but there were many people gathered at his house, and she returned home, without having been able to meet him. The next day the Prophet came to the house of Ali and Fatima and asked what it was she had wanted to discuss with him, but Fatima remained silent. Then 'Ali told the Prophet the whole story. The Prophet did not, however, accede to their request for a servant. "Fear God," he said, "and fulfil your duty to the Lord. Continue to do your housework and, when you go to bed at night, glorify God 33 times, praise him the same number of times and exalt him 34 times. That makes 100 times altogether. That will do you more good than a servant will."

*(Al- Targheeb wa al- Tarheeb)*

## Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving for man is to acknowledge the blessings of God. This acknowledgement first arises in the heart then, taking the form of words, it comes to the lips of the grateful person.

From birth, man has been superbly endowed in body and mind by his Creator. All his requirements have been amply catered for, every object in the heavens and on earth having been pressed into his service. All the things necessary for his leading a good life on earth and the building of a civilization have been provided in abundance.

Man experiences these blessings at every moment. It is, therefore, incumbent on man to thank God for His blessings at all times. His heart should be eternally brimming with gratitude for these divine blessings.

Thanksgiving is the most comprehensive term of worship: gratefulness is the essence of the godly life. The best expression of that gratefulness is the expenditure of time and money in the way of God. It is God, after all who has given man the reason to worship Him and the means to do so.

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## WHATEVER HAPPENS IS THE WILL OF GOD

When certain people offered to guard Ali (The fourth Caliph), the son of Abu Talib, the latter replied, "Destiny is man's guardian." According to another tradition, he said, "No man will taste the joy of faith until he realizes that he could never have escaped what has befallen him, nor enjoyed what escaped him."

(Abu Dawud, *Sunan*)

## Dhikr

(Remembrance of God)

*Dhikr*, meaning remembrance, that is, remembrance of God, is one of the basic teachings of Islam. The opposite state, that of forgetfulness of God, is unpardonable negligence.

*Dhikr* is a reality of nature. At every moment man experience those things which are directly related with God. He sees the sun, the moon, the rivers, the mountains, the air and the water. All of these are God's creations. It is but natural that all the creations that come before man should be reminders of the Creator. Right from the earth to the heavens, all things are manifestation of God's Beauty and Perfection. With their whole existence they serve as harbingers of God's Being.

Similarly in the world, as man leads his life, day and night, his attention is drawn at all times to God. Being influenced by God's creation, his heart and mind produce divine feelings. *Dhikr*, is nothing but the verbal expression of these feelings.

Throughout his life man experiences his attachment to God again and again, and when he ponders over his existence, his heart is filled with rejoicing that God created him in the most noble image and lavished upon him all the best qualities. These feelings well up in his heart in many ways. This is also a form of *dhikr*.

Man undergoes many kinds of ups and downs in his daily life; he has pleasant as well as unpleasant experiences of all kinds. As he goes through these experiences he repeatedly turns to God and remembers Him in different words, again and again.

Similarly, during his daily obeisance he repeats many prayers. These words of prayer are derived sometimes from the Qur'an and sometimes from the hadith. These words coming spontaneously to his lips are the stuff of *dhikr*, the remembrance of God.

## Divine Way

There are countless stars and asteroids in the universe. All of these are incessantly rotating in the vastness of space. Space is like a limitless runway for the movement at great speed of these countless orbiting bodies. But what is most amazing is that neither the planets nor the stars ever collide in their course.

What is the secret? The secret lies in their rotation within their own orbits with the utmost precision and without the slightest deviation. It is this law of motion which has prevented the heavenly bodies from colliding.

Exactly the same course is desirable for human beings. For the human course too God has set a fixed sphere within the limits of which every human being has to move. If everyone moves in his respective sphere, a state of peace is automatically established in society. But when people cross their limits, and break the barriers set for them, society will witness clashes and confrontations. Those who deliberately or even unthinkingly collide with other people will not only invite their own destruction but will also destroy others.

How must man live in social life? How should he deal with others? What should be his behaviour? What norms should he follow in his sayings and deeds? For all this God has given clear commands. He has explained what man should do and what he should not do. In "life's daily affairs opting for the course permitted by God is like the stars moving in the orbits fixed for them. On the other hand, indulgence in forbidden things is like deviation from the fixed sphere. It is people who deviate in this way who cause all kinds of evil and corruption, and who, in their straying, destroy not only themselves but also the society in which they live.

The true believer is one who leads his life in the sphere appointed for him by God. It is those who unswervingly pursue the course set for them by their Creator, will share God's blessings in this world as well as His eternal blessings in the Hereafter.



## Wealth

Wealth is one of life's necessities. But it is not life's goal. If wealth is necessary to fulfill life's material requirements, then it must be acquired as the mainstay of human existence. But if wealth is projected as life's goal and its ever-increasing acquisition is considered the most important task, then it can become a source of great misery which will destroy its seekers not only in this world but also in the Hereafter.

Man has to live in this world for a certain period of time. For this, he requires some material facilities which may serve as a support in his life. The majority of these things must be purchased with money. So it is essential for everyone to provide himself with the means to do so. In this respect wealth is a precious asset for all of us.

But perhaps a more important acquisition is that of knowledge. Without knowledge man cannot strive for spiritual progress; he cannot play a positive role in the construction of humanity. He has to acquire knowledge so that he may live in society as a useful and beneficial part of it.

This indeed is a much more worthy goal than the simple acquisition of wealth. But the attainment of this goal is possible only when man devotes the greater part of his energies towards reaching it. The activities of earning money have to be kept within a certain limit and only then will he find time to attain this nobler goal.

Money may fulfill the physical or material needs of man. But it is not sufficient to fulfill his spiritual and intellectual needs. One who makes the acquisition of wealth his life's goal, will of course, continue to receive bodily nourishment, but his soul will all the while have been starving. The intellectual part of his mind, remaining continuously in an under-nourished state, will finally cease to exist.

That is why wealth is called *fitna* (source of trial, that is, it is given to man as a test). The proper use of money leads man to all kind of progress, whereas the wrong use of it casts man headlong into the pit of destruction.

## Gaining or Losing

In this world man sometimes loses, sometimes gains. These vicissitudes are the common lot. No one is exempt from them.

Now the question is how man should react to them. Islam tells us that both these experiences are meant as tests. Here gaining is not in itself synonymous with success. Similarly, losing does not mean that an individual has failed for all time.

Losing and winning are not in themselves important. What is of actual importance is how people conduct themselves when facing these experiences.

So, when a man suffers a loss, he should not consider himself a failure and a deprived person; he should not lose hope and courage, and begin uttering endless complaints. He must rather prove his courage, and, bearing up under the burden of adversity, retain his mental balance. He must consciously regard both the "give" and the "take" as being from God. He has thus to accept God's decisions. For it is by his willingness to do so that he will entitle himself to a share in God's mercy.

Similarly, when he has the experience of gaining he should not become haughty and start regarding himself as superior to others.

On the contrary, success should only increase his modesty. He should become all the more particular regarding his duties in relation to God and humanity and perform them the more rigorously.

In this world, losing and gaining are both forms of testing. Neither is the loser a failure, nor is the gainer a success. The actual criterion of success and failure is how each has reacted to those situations.

The successful person is one who keeps his balance and composure whether gaining or losing. Neither experience should make him deviate from the path of moderation. Those who remain on this straight and narrow path are successful in the eyes of God. Nothing will hinder their progress towards success.

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## SYCOPHANTIC SUBORDINATES PORTEND DISASTER

Aishah reports the Prophet as saying: "When God desires the good of someone in a position of power, he assigns to him an honest counsellor, one who reminds him of God's word when he forgets it, and who assists him when he remembers it. And when he desires the opposite for anyone, he gives him an evil counsellor, one who does not remind him when he forgets and does not assist him when he remembers."

*(Abu Dawud, Sunan)*

## Sacrifice

One of the qualities of the believers described in the Qur'an is the readiness to sacrifice one's interests for the sake of another; that is, holding the needs of others to be above one's own; taking the trouble to help others; giving preference to others, occupying a back seat oneself. This human quality is termed *eesar* (sacrifice) in the Qur'an.

After the emigration a number of Muslims came to Madinah from Makkah. These people were evidently going to become a burden upon the Medinan Muslims. Because at that time the emigrants were empty-handed; while the local inhabitants (*Ansar*) had houses, lands, orchards, etc. But the Medinan Muslims, gave a hearty welcome to these newcomers, who were apparently about to become a source of economic liability. Referring to this question, the Qur'an observed: "Those, before them, who had homes in the City (Madinah) and embraced the Faith before them, love those who have sought refuge with them; they entertain no desire in their hearts for what they are given, but rather prefer them above themselves, though they are in want. Those that preserve themselves from their own greed shall surely prosper." (59:9)

This willingness to sacrifice is a superior human quality. It is something which is experienced daily by the people. Almost every morning and evening such occasions arise when one feels the necessity for one kind of sacrifice or the other, the need to recede into the background and leave the path clear for others to go forward; to suffer oneself in order to give comfort to others; to cut down one's own expenses to be able to help others; to suppress one's own personality so that others may come to the fore, to remain silent to allow others to speak; to keep one's conveyance to one side in order to give room for others to go ahead to their destinations. Such self-sacrifice is called *eesar*. It is a form of altruism. According to the Quran, it is those who possess this quality who will prosper.

## Compassionate Behaviour

God's attribute in the Qur'an is said to be 'The Compassionate' , 'The Merciful'. That is, very kind and sympathetic. Similarly the Prophet of Islam, has been called 'A Mercy to the Worlds' (21: 107). That is, the Prophet of Islam has been sent as a blessing to the whole world. The most prominent quality of the Prophet is his being the instrument of universal mercy.

The Qur'an, as a matter of divine guidance urges people to exercise patience and compassion in their dealings with one another. This means that everyone should treat others with sympathy and kindness. Even when one experiences unkindness from others one should not return unkindness for unkindness, but should continue to behave sympathetically. Alqurtubi has interpreted this verse' and they exhort one another to patience and compassion' to mean that creatures of God (human beings) ought to be dealt with mercifully.

A number of traditions have been related in the books of hadith, which enshrine certain observations made on this subject by the Prophet of Islam. Here are three of them: "God will be merciful to those who are merciful (to His creatures)." "You should be merciful to people on earth, God on high will be merciful to you."

This teaching of Islam spread so widely that it came to be included in Muslim literature allover the world. Every language reverberated with these ideas. An Indian Muslim poet composed this couplet:

*Karo meherbani tum ahl-e-zameen par*  
*(Be kind to people on earth)*  
*Khuda meherban hoga arsh-e-barin par*  
*(God on high will be merciful to you)*

Of all matters which are of great personal importance, the virtue of mercy is ranked as the foremost. That is why the Prophet of Islam observes: God will not show mercy to one who does not show mercy to others. (Sahih al-Bukhari, *Kitab al-Tawhid*)

## Justice

One of the very important demands of humanity is that we should deal justly with others. In no circumstances should we follow the path of injustice or oppression. That is why Islam has laid great stress on adopting a just attitude.

The Qur'an states: 'Allah enjoins justice and kindness' (16:90). At another place the Qur'an has this to say: 'My Lord enjoins justice' (7:29). The material symbol of justice is a weighing scale. Just as a balance divides things in proper measure, so should man's acts and deeds tip the scales in favour of justice. In any contentious situation man ought to act fairly, and when he speaks, his words should be weighed by the measure of reality.

The Qur'an has repeatedly commanded that social issues should always be resolved with justice. For instance, the Qur'an says: "Allah commands you to pass judgement upon men with fairness" (4:58). Similarly it says, "Give just weight and full measure ... speak for justice, even if it affects your own kinsmen" (6:153). At another place it commands that in controversial matters peace should be made between antagonists in equity and justice.' (49:9)

It is a general command. In the family and in society differences will always arise. On such occasions, it is the duty of all the concerned members to settle the matter in accordance with justice without tilting towards any party; the settlement should be made according to the demands of justice and truth.

Then the Qur'an enjoins: "O believers, be dutiful to Allah and bearers of just witness. Do not allow your hatred for other men to turn you away from justice. Deal justly; justice is nearer to true piety." (5:8)

This shows the great importance of justice. That is, we have to stick to justice even when dealing with the enemy. The system of the earth and the heavens is established on perfect justice, so it is only right and proper that man's code of conduct should likewise be based on justice. In this world of God, there is no place for the path of injustice.

## Profitability and beneficence

The Qur'an tells us that this world has been made by God in such a way that here only "that which is of use to mankind remains on the earth. (13: 17)

Everything on earth is made on this principle. A thing remains in this world only so long as it possesses the character of profitability. When it loses this character, it loses the right to survive as well. At this stage, the system of nature casts it away, holding it as unwanted.

This same system of nature has been approved of by God for man as well (3:83). The desired man of God is one who leads his life in this world as an exercise profitable to himself and beneficial to others. He is one who fills himself to become a giver person in the real sense of the word; from whom others receive things required for their existence and survival on earth. It is such a person who can rightly be called a human being. It is such a person who deserves to achieve success and progress in this world of God.

According to a hadith, the Prophet of Islam observed: Among you whoever may benefit his brethren ought to benefit them. (Sahih Muslim)

Great resources are not necessarily required for beneficence, which can take many forms and be practiced by anyone. For example, giving a piece of good advice; lending a helping hand to another; showing the right path to someone who has gone astray; if possible, giving monetary assistance; removing obstacles in the way – all of these acts come under the heading of beneficence. And supposing one is not able to help one's brother in any of these ways, one may pray for him. This would also count as an act designed to profit another.

## How to Behave with Neighbours

According to a hadith, “To God the best companion is one who is best for his companion and the best neighbour is one who is best for his neighbour.” (At-Tirmizi)

The Qur’an goes further with the more specific injunction to “show kindness to near and distant neighbours, to fellow travellers and to the wayfarers” (4:36).

This means that it is incumbent upon us to behave well towards all kinds of neighbours, whether they are permanent residents of the neighbourhood, or are only living there temporarily for the purposes of education, business or travel, etc. Wherever one is living in close proximity to others, one must feel obliged to observe their rights as human being. No one should be the cause of trouble to his neighbour. On separate occasion, the Prophet observed, “One who believes in God should not give trouble to his neighbour” and “one who believes in God should accord due respect to his neighbours” (Al-Bukhari). As an individual, therefore, a Muslim must be a good neighbour, while, on the larger scale of the community, Muslims should prove to be good neighbours at the national level as well.

The Prophet, again on two separate occasions, thus defined the essence of good neighbourliness: “By God, a person cannot be a believer (that is, a Muslim) until and unless he likes for his neighbours and for his brother what he likes for himself.” “A person from whose evils his neighbour is not safe will not go to heaven.” (Sahih Muslim)



## Speaking the Truth

The Qur'an defines believers as men and women who speak the truth. The noblest quality in a man or woman is honesty and avoidance of falsehood at all times. Indeed, nothing less than absolute truthfulness befits the human character.

Many traditions have been related which show the importance of truth. For instance, according to one tradition, the Prophet of Islam observed: You should speak the truth, because speaking the truth leads man to a life of virtue. And you should keep your distance from someone who tells lies, because telling lies leads man to a life of evil.

This hadith commands us to speak the truth and it also tells us the wisdom of speaking the truth. When a man takes real care to speak the truth, a truth-loving personality is developed within him. The colour of truth dominates his temperament and thinking. Such a soul is nurtured within him as is free of all the evils of psychological complexes. In this way there is nothing to prevent the basic quality of honesty from shining through on all occasions.

On the contrary, one who, whenever he speaks, utters falsehoods, is sullyng his inner personality. Purity of soul does not develop within him. He becomes more and more immersed in evil. This is why, according to a hadith, the Prophet observed: The best utterance to me is that of the truth. The trader who is truthful and trustworthy will be raised on Doomsday along with the Prophets. (Bukhari)

## Discharging Obligations

After the emigration the Prophet of Islam gave his blessings to Salman and Abu Darda becoming like brothers to one another. When they began to live together. Salman saw that Abu Darda fasted during the day and continued to pray for the greater part of the night. This left little room for discharging other responsibilities.

Therefore Salman asked Abu Darda not to keep praying all the time saying, that he had some duties towards other human beings as well, and that he should attend to them. When this incident came into the knowledge of the Prophet, he observed: Salman is right. According to another tradition, the Prophet said: Salman is a *faqih* (having insight into religion) and that he had been granted a share in religious knowledge by God. (*Fathul Bari*)

The fulfillment of obligations is so serious a matter in Islam that according to a hadith, the Prophet said: "If you have failed to pay what is due to your creditors, you will have to pay them what you owe on the day of Judgement. (Sahih Muslim) That is, one who fails in the payment of these dues in this world of trial, will have to make their payment in a far more rigorous manner in the Hereafter. There he shall have to make good debts with the currency of his good deeds, as on that day there will be nothing else with which to pay.

Discharging one's duties is not concerned with just one thing but with many things. For instance, as a householder, you should fulfill the responsibilities that fall on you as regards your wife and children. Neighbours have the right to expect that you will not create any problems for them. Then, even in walking along a path every one has an equal 'right of way', so that you should not obstruct any wayfarer in his journey. Society has the right to demand that your dealing with them be in a spirit of well-wishing. The nation likewise has the right to charge you with its welfare and to expect that you may never be oblivious of this responsibility.

The fulfilling of rights is a complete ideology. There is no realm of life to which it does not relate.

## Restraining Anger

Believers have been defined in the Qur'an as these who "when angered are willing to forgive." (42:37)

This means that when a believer is confronted with such a behaviour as makes him angry, he does not retaliate with anger, but rather returns forgiveness for anger. By adopting the path of avoidance, he nips the evil in the bud. Then, instead of becoming embroiled with his antagonist, he engages himself in his own constructive work.

Once a man came to the Prophet of Islam and said to him: "O Prophet of God, give me some advice which I may follow all my life. And let this advice be brief so that I do not forget it." The Prophet replied, "Do not be angry." (Muwatta Imam Malik)

Anger never surfaces without reason. It always bursts forth when some provocative thing happens, when someone ill treats you or when someone says something which hurts your ego. Anger is a reaction. It generally manifests itself when you are faced with some unpleasant experience.

On such occasions one way of dealing with the situation is that of reaction, that is, of returning tit for tat. But this is not the teaching of Islam. The teaching of Islam is that when someone says something to anger you, even then you do not become angry. Even when someone tries hard to provoke you, you remain undisturbed.

A believer has this conviction that, if he remains patient in the face of the trouble stirred up by others, he will be amply rewarded for it by God. This conviction generates an unfathomable peace of mind within him, so that he is no longer disturbed by any antagonism. This spirit of faith converts his anger into forgiveness. Provocation is slotted as something to be disregarded. He even derives food for modesty and humanity from the very things which are designed to destroy his peace of mind.

## Truth and Paradise

Once a person came to the Prophet and said: O Prophet, by God, it is my earnest desire to go to heaven. Tell me what action I should perform for my desire to become a reality. The Prophet replied, "Speak the truth." When man speaks the truth he does good deeds. His heart is illuminated with the light of faith, and when the heart is blessed with the wealth of faith, he secures an entrance to God's paradise. (Nuqush-e-Seerat by Hakim Mohd. Sayeed)

## The Concept of Man

Man is God's servant. Man has been created by God with a plan, that is, to place him temporarily on earth in order to test him. Then those who pass this test will be rewarded, while those who fail will be rejected.

For the purposes of this test, man has been granted freedom in this world. Whatever man receives in this world is not as a matter of right but only as a matter of trial. Every situation here is a test, and in all situations man must give a proper performance, as is required of him by God.

The proper attitude for man is not to take to the paths of his desires, but to try to understand the divine plan of creation and then after being convinced of its ineluctability, he should build his life accordingly.

Man may deviate from the divine plan by misusing the freedom given to him by God, but he cannot save himself from the consequences of this deviation.

In such a state of affairs, it is in the interest of man himself that he remain extremely cautious in determining the course of his life. Instead of being guided by his own will and desires, he should make God's will his guide. Instead of pursuing his own desires, he should lead a life in conformance with the commands of God.

Man may be a masterpiece of divine creation, but he must nevertheless remain subservient to the plan of God. Making a full acknowledgement of these two aspects of the existence of mankind is the key to human progress.

Man succeeded in building a modern industrial civilization by discovering and exploiting the laws of nature. Similarly in the next world man will achieve lasting success on a much vaster scale, but only after striving earnestly to comprehend the creation plan of God for humanity and then adhering unflinchingly to its edicts.

## Social Work

One of the noble feelings that a believer should possess is the urge or desire to come to the assistance of others. He should fulfil their needs without expecting any return.

Coming to the assistance of others is, in essence, an acknowledgement of the blessings which God has showered upon him. It is that person, who helps others who has something more than others. For example, one who has eyes comes to the assistance of one who has not been blessed with the precious gift of sight; an able bodied person will give physical help to the disabled; a wealthy person will give donations to the poor; the man with resources will come to the aid of one who lacks them, and so on.

On all such occasions when one man helps out another by virtue of those blessings which God has given him, he is in fact showing his gratitude to God for these favours. He is saying within himself, O God, whatever I have is all given by You. Now I am spending it in Your path, I pray You for more blessings and mercy for both of us (the helper and the receiver).

By engaging oneself in social work, one is not only helping another but is actually raising his own moral status. Making use of one's possessions only for oneself is to live on the plane of animals, for the beasts share nothing with others.

Man, superior to all other creatures, lives on a far higher plane. The proper attitude in accordance with his status is not to keep himself to himself but to embrace the whole of humanity. He should lead his life as a well-wisher to all, ready to help everyone, accepting others' rights over his own possessions.

Social work is in other words, service to humanity. And after the worship of God, no task is nobler.

## Islam and Women

Islam, one of the most misunderstood religions, is essentially dynamic. It is wrong to say that it is antifeminist and does not encourage change. A dispassionate study of its basic tenets would make it exceedingly clear that its sole purpose is to enable both men and women to follow the straight path leading to peace and bliss in this world as well as in the world to come.

In order to have a correct understanding of women's status in Islam we should first address the question – Is the idea of change and adaptation to a new environment created by the passage of time obnoxious to it?

Every question whether it is the abrogation of the age-old infamous law of polygamy as envisaged by the apex court in its recent judgement or any other suitable alteration to be made in the Shariat Act has to be answered with reference to the question posed above.

To begin with, Islam is not opposed to change if it is in the interest of the common people inhabiting the globe. We cannot sidetrack the fact that Islam was necessitated by the momentous changes that were taking place in Arabia.

Those who insist that each and every word written in the Holy Book is to be followed irrespective of the changed circumstances are certainly mistaken in their belief. Change is the law of Nature and to set one's face against the wind of change sweeping across the world today is to do violence to one's reason. It is not necessary to follow every word written in the sacred books without a frame of reference to the time when it was conceived and acted upon for the benefit of the contemporary society. Those words may have no use for us today and, therefore, to insist on their observance is not just and proper.

The Holy Qur'an enjoins on us the sacred task of following only those verses which are basic to it; if anybody follows the verses which are not its foundation, he is charged with perversity. It categorically lays down:

"In it are some verses basic or fundamental. They are the foundation of the Book; others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical seeking discord and searching for its hidden meanings. (Sura 3: Verse 7).

The condition of women in the Muslim world in seventh century AD was appalling. By and large women were treated as goods and chattel. Female infanticide was in vogue. Both the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah condemn this evil practice in the strongest possible words. The Qur'an says: "Kill not your children on a plea of want. We provide sustenance for you and for them." It further says: "Verily the killing of them is a great sin." It was Islam which, for the first time in the history of the world, took bold steps to outlaw the cruel practice of female infanticide.

Prophet Muhammad made no distinction between men and women. His sons died young and the children who continued to live were all daughters. He looked after them with great love and care as if to

set an example for others to emulate. He said: "Whoever has a daughter and does not bury her alive scold her or prefer his male children to her may God bring him into paradise." According to a hadith the Prophet had once articulated that the greatest human virtue is to do good to one's daughter after she has been returned by her husband. It is a totally wrong belief that polygamy had been introduced by Islam. It is a fact that every civilised nation had practised polygamy in the past. Till 1955 polygamy was in vogue in Hindu society. It was an approved form of marriage in Christendom only a few hundred years ago.

The custom of polygamous marriage still exists in many parts of the world. In our neighbouring country, Tibet, for example, a woman is allowed to marry a number of men. Thus polygamy and polyandry have been existing side by side.

Islam did not encourage plural marriage on the contrary, it restricted the number of wives to four. Even this liberty to marry more than one woman was made subject to the rule that one could not take more than one wife if he was not sure of giving equal and just treatment to all of them. The Holy Qur'an is very clear on this point. It lays down; "Marry women of your choice, two or three, or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one."

Muslim personal laws are not entirely scriptural. Most of these laws are of recent origin. The Shariat Act, for instance, was enacted by the British legislature in 1937 and later on came to be regarded as the Muslim Personal Law. Many of its provisions relating to marriage, divorce, inheritance, maintenance and custody of children are outdated and require timely alteration without touching the fundamental rules of conduct enjoined on the whole mankind by the Holy Book and the Hadith.

Notwithstanding the natural differences between men and women Islam accords equal status to them. Besides conferring innumerable rights on women, Islam has enhanced their prestige in family and community. At the time of Prophet Muhammad women were exhorted to act as Imams and could lead congregational prayer.

The Prophet was very emphatic on giving respect to women He said, "A Muslim must not hate his wife and if he be displeased with one bad quality in her, let him be pleased with another which is good." "Heaven lies at the feet of mother" this and other sayings of the Prophet show his mental attitude towards women in general

After the passing away of Prophet Muhammad around 632 AD the strong edifice of women's rights started to crumble down.

Although the Qur'anic legislation sought to improve women's status considerably, many evil practices crept into society. Triple divorce in one sitting is one such evil. The conferment of absolute right on the husband to divorce his wife at will cannot be justified. This practice is not in conformity with the true Islamic principles relating to dissolution of marriage.

Time has come to understand and interpret Islamic laws correctly and to do away with discrimination based on sex, place of birth, colour, creed and caste.

*(By Himanshu Shekhar Jha, The Hindustan Times, June 26, 1995).*



## Policy of Peace in Islam

Islam is a religion of peace. The Qur'an calls its (Quranic) way 'the paths of peace' (5:16). The Qur'an calls the policy of reconciliation as the best policy (4:128) and that God does not love the disturbance of peace (2:205).

According to the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, a believer is one from whom people feel secure as regards their life and wealth.

One practical question arises in this regard that in the present world, for one reason or another, differences, political as well as non-political, as always, arises among individuals as well as groups, Muslims as well as non-Muslims. Now if people refuse to tolerate differences, insisting on ending the differences as soon as they are born, this would result in fighting. With the result that peace could never be obtained in the world. How then in such a situation can peace be secured?

One recent example of this difference is that of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a very ancient historical city. With an added speciality that billions of people believe it to be their sacred place. Jerusalem is a symbol and centre of inspiration for the three great Semitic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For Jews it is a living proof of their ancient grandeur and centre of national history. For Christians, it is the scene of their Saviour's agony and triumph. For Muslims, the first destination of the Prophet's mystic journey and the site of one of Islam's most sacred shrines. Thus for all three faiths it is a centre of pilgrimage and the third holiest place of worship.

Now the question arises that when it is a place of worship for all the three religions, how it can be freely accessible to all. How the adherents of all the three religions can have the opportunity to be able to satisfy their religious feelings.

Nowadays all around us we hear the slogan 'Jerusalem is our's'. This slogan has political connotations to it. The raising of this slogan by each party shows that it wants its own political supremacy over Quds or Jerusalem. All the three believe that so long as they are unable to hold their political dominance over this sacred city they cannot perform worship in the proper sense of the word.

If the condition of visiting this sacred place should be that only that person or group could visit Jerusalem who enjoys its political dominance there, this place then will be turned into a battlefield instead of being a place of peaceful worship. As political power can be wielded, only by one religious group at a time, the rest two religious groups who would not be enjoying political power will wage an ongoing war against the religious group in power. In this way this place will become a centre of clash and confrontation for eternity. As a result not even the group in power will have the opportunity to perform its worship peacefully.

So far as the question of Islam is concerned, two indirect references are available in the Qur'an and Hadith regarding Jerusalem. Chapter Al-Isra describes the ascension of the Prophet in these words:

'Glory be to Him who made His Servant go by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest Mosque whose precincts We have blessed, that We might show him (some) of Our Signs (17:1).

The traditions tell us that prior to the emigration in 622 (Early period of the year 622) the Prophet Muhammad experienced an extraordinary journey which is called *Mi'raj* (Ascension) in the history of Islam. In this journey through God's unseen arrangement the Prophet reached Jerusalem from Mecca. Here at the holy site he performed a prayer in congregation alongwith all the Prophets at the site of al-Masjid al-Aqsa (al-Bayt al-Maqdis).

Another indirect reference to Jerusalem is found in a *hadith* recorded in all the seven authentic books of Hadith with minor differences in wording. According to this tradition there are only three mosques for which it is lawful in Islam to undertake a journey for saying prayer - al-Masjid al-Haram, al-Masjid an-Nabawi and al-Masjid al-Aqsa. Certain traditions have used the word Masjid Ilia for al-Masjid al-Aqsa, that is, the Mosque at Palestine. Another tradition tells us that the reward for praying in these three mosques is far more than praying in other mosques.

On the one hand this special status is accorded to Jerusalem's Aqsa mosque that worship in it is considered far more superior to any other mosques except for that of Mecca and Medina. On the other hand, we learn from the Qur'an that in no part of the world political power can always be wielded by the same nation or group.

It goes on changing from time to time between different communities. According to Qur'an: 'We bring these days to men by turns' (3: 140).

Now the question arises that when according to the very law of nature the political power at Jerusalem can never eternally remain with one nation, what is the way to worship at al-Masjid al-Aqsa for the believers. Each Muslim naturally has the desire to enter this mosque and prostrate before God like the Prophet Muhammad and other Prophets did. Now if this prostration in worship is linked to the fact that a Muslim can be blessed with this greatest favour only when this territory/land enjoys Muslim political rule, the millions of Muslims including the former Saudi King Faisal ibn Abdul Aziz (1906-1975) would have to leave this world with this cherished desire buried in their hearts, failing to experience such precious feelings of being able to prostrate for the Almighty God at a place where the Prophet Muhammad alongwith all the Prophets had prostrated before God.

What is the solution to this problem. Its solution lies in the very Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. To sum it up, separation of the political aspect of the matter and the taking of its religious aspect – availing the possibilities by avoiding the problem. Here are certain examples of this Sunnah of the Prophet.

1. The Prophet Muhammad emigrated to Medina from Mecca in July 622. In Medina he alongwith his

Companions used to pray for about one and a half years (till the end of 623) in the direction of al-Bayt al-Maqdis. In the beginning of 624 the injunction was revealed in the Qur'an to turn their face towards the Sacred Mosque at Mecca for saying prayers (2: 144).

When this injunction regarding the change in Qiblah (Direction of prayer) was revealed, another injunction was revealed alongwith this in these words: "O believers, seek assistance in prayer. Allah is with those who are patient (2: 153). Patience has a general connotation to it, but on this occasion it had a particular connotation that was, that at the time when the injunction of making Ka 'bah as Qiblah was revealed, 360 idols were placed in Ka'bah. Ka'bah at that point of time had practically become a centre of polytheism. In this way the believers could have felt reluctant to set the direction of their prayer being believers in Monotheism, toward a structure which had practically turned into a centre of polytheism. They were asked to put this aspect in the slot of patience and be ready to carry out this injunction.

As history tells us, this state of affairs continued for a long period of six years till the conquest of Mecca. That is, for six years Muslims continued to say their prayers in the direction of Ka 'bah 'which housed hundreds of idols, it was in the full sense of the word an active centre of polytheism. This state of affairs ended only with the conquest of Mecca when the Ka'bah was cleared from all the idols.

This tells us a very important principle of Islam called *Al-fasl bayn al-Qaziyatayn*, that is to separate two matters from one another.

Under this principle Ka 'bah and the idols were separated from one another. Remaining patient on the presence of idols, Ka'bah was accepted as the direction for prayer.

2. Another example in this connection is to be found in the event of *Isra* and *Mi'raj*. This heavenly journey took place before the emigration in 622. At that point in time Jerusalem was ruled by non-Muslims. It were non-Muslim Iranians who wielded political power. History tells us that Iranian ruler, Khusroe Parvez attacked Jerusalem in 614, wresting it from the Romans who had been governing it since 63 B.C. This political dominance of Iranian empire ended only when the Roman emperor Heraclius defeated the Iranians, restoring their rule over Jerusalem.

This means that when the Prophet Muhammad entered Jerusalem before his emigration during his *Mi'raj* journey to say his prayers at al-Masjid al-Aqsa, Jerusalem at that time, was under the rule of a non-Muslim king, Khusroe Parvez. From this we derive a very important sunnah of the Prophet that worship and politics should not be confused with one another.

3. The third example is to be found after the Hijrah in 629. At that time Makkah was entirely under the possession of the idolatrous Quraysh. In spite of that the Prophet along with his companions entered Makkah for three days to perform 'Umrah (minor pilgrimage) and circumambulation of the Ka 'bah. It was possible only because he did not mix up the worship aspect with the political aspect. If the Prophet had considered this condition necessary that 'Umrah could be performed only when Mecca comes under the Muslim political rule, he would never have entered Mecca alongwith his companions.

In the light of this sunnah of the Prophet the solution to the present problem of Jerusalem lies in separating the aspect of worship in al-Masjid al-Aqsa with the issue of political possession. Muslims belonging to Palestine or of other countries should come here freely in order to pray for God in the al-Aqsa Mosque. Worship should no longer be linked with the question of political power.

The Islamic principle of *Al-fasl bayn al-Qaziyatayn* (to separate two matters from one another) is not just for Jerusalem, it has to do with the entire world. The universal democratic revolution in modern times has given complete religious freedom to Muslims of all over the world. This is a great blessing of God, which they never had in any given period of history. Muslims must fully avail this blessing of freedom. If the political institution is in the hands of non-Muslims or secular Muslims, they should not wage war against them. Accepting freedom of worship with gratefulness and contentment, they must put the political matter into the future slot (That is, to wait for the times to change in their favour by the grace of God).

Such response from Muslims would in itself be a great form of worship. According to a hadith 'the Prophet said: "Waiting for opening/relief is a superior form of worship."

## THE GREATEST FAVOUR TO SEEK FROM GOD IS FORGIVENESS

According to Anas ibn Malik, the Helpers (Madinan Muslims) suffered from not having enough camels to irrigate their land. They came, therefore, to the Prophet, hoping that he would be able to provide them with camels, or arrange for a canal to be dug which would bring them an abundant supply of water. The Prophet looked towards the Helpers and greeted them thrice. "Whatever you ask of me today, I shall certainly give you," he said. "And whatever I ask of God on your behalf, He will surely grant." At these words, the Helpers experienced a change of heart. "The greatest thing we can ask for is the Hereafter," they thought. "Why waste such a precious opportunity by asking for the world?" Then they said to one another, "Let us take advantage of this opportunity and ask for forgiveness." Addressing the Prophet they said, "Ask the Lord to forgive us." "Lord, forgive the Helpers," was the Prophet's immediate response. "Forgive their children: forgive their wives."

*(Ahmad, Musnad)*

## JUSTICE KNOWS NEITHER LOVE NOR HATE

According to Abdullah ibn Umar, Abdullah ibn Rawaha used to go to Khaibar every year for the purpose of collecting taxes. The levy, according to his own calculation, was one half of the total date crop. But the Jews of Khaibar complained that the date crop was not as much as he made it out to be, and even offered him a bribe to show them some leniency. "Enemies of God" exclaimed Abdullah ibn Rawaha. "So you have a mind to make me dabble in what is unlawful? By God, I have been sent here by one who is dearer to me than the entire world, while my dislike for you is greater than for similar number of swine and monkeys. But neither my dislike for you, nor my love for him, would ever prevent me from being just towards you." "It is justice such as this on which rest the heavens and the earth!" exclaimed the Jews.

*(al-Baihaqi, al-Sunan al-Kubra)*

## Prayer

Prayer is worship of God. It is obligatory for the believer to pray five times a day. These prayers are performed in mosques in congregation.

But prior to the performance of prayer comes *wudu*, ablution. In ablution the hands, face, and feet are washed with water. This washing in order to cleanse awakens the feeling in man that he should always lead a life of purity. Then by uttering the words 'God is Great' he enters into the act of *namaz*. This is to acknowledge that all greatness belongs to God. Thus the proper attitude for man is to lead a life of modesty and humility.

By reciting some parts from the Qur'an in prayer, the devotee refreshes his memory about God's commandments regarding himself. Then he kneels and prostrates himself before God, in physical expression with the sincere feeling that the only course that befits him is to lead his life as a submissive servant of God.

The prayer is concluded by turning the face first to the right side, then to the left, and uttering the words '*Assalam-o-alaikum*' (Peace and blessings of God be upon you). This is a demonstration of the fact that, spiritually conditioned by prayer, the devotees are now entering into the world with no other thoughts and feelings in their minds but those of mercy towards others, and peace for all mankind. Prayer turns their resolve to remain peaceful members of society, and to harbour no ill feelings towards anyone.

Prayer in one respect is the worship of God, and in another it is an acknowledgement of the divinity of God. It is to surrender before God, attributing all kinds of greatness to Him alone.

In yet another respect, prayer prepares the individual to lead a worthy life among people, adopting an attitude of modesty, sympathy and good-will in all his dealings. In short, prayer perfects man's relation with God as well as with other human beings.